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World Chronicle

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UN SPECIAL COMMISSION (UNSCOM)

Ambassador Rolf EKEUS, Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), reviews the progress achieved in the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The Commission has succeeded in the neutralization of wide-range and diverse missile capabilities as well as in the creation of a unique and effective monitoring and verification system. UNSCOM is confident that Iraq is not producing long-range missiles, but it has not been able to account for a number of missiles and certain high-quality chemical and biological warfare agents Iraq had acquired. Iraq does not now constitute a major threat to its neighbours, but in a short time it could once again become a major threat. Ambassador Ekeus supports a dialogue between Iraq and its adversaries to solve their problems.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

When the gulf war ended more than five years ago, the Security Council imposed sanctions on Iraq and established the United Nations Special Commission to monitor the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. But because of humanitarian needs, the international community has recently allowed Iraq to resume exporting oil on a limited basis. Does this mean that Iraq has honoured all it obligations and eliminated its weapons of mass destruction once and for all?

With us today to update us on the latest developments and to discuss Iraq's compliance and whether or not all sanctions imposed by the Security Council should be lifted is Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, Executive Chairman of the Special Commission. Joining me to talk with Ambassador Ekeus are Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Raghida Dergham of *Al Hayat*, also of London.

Ambassador Ekeus, welcome to World Chronicle.

Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Chairman, I guess when you took on this job you didn't expect that five years or more later you'd still be doing it. And in your most recent report it sort of boils down to this is the good news and this is the bad news, but the bad news presumably outweighs the good news. What is the current state of play?

EKEUS: Well, the good news is that we have a monitoring system in place. That is a system which should guarantee that Iraq is not acquiring the prohibited items again. The Security Council in '96, early '96, took a very important resolution, namely, establishing an export-import mechanism which is helping the Commission to control that for the future that Iraq is not importing prohibited items. That means not only the weapons, but production capabilities related to such weapons. So that, in connection with other control systems, I think constitutes good news.

However, the negative side is that weapons Iraq acquired or built in the period before the war against Kuwait, the attack on Kuwait, there still appears to remain important and significant items. Now, I must hasten to add that most of these items have been accounted for. A large number of missiles have been destroyed, long-range missiles; a huge amount of chemical weapons, nerve agents like Sarin, soman, Tabun, mustard agent have been destroyed; a huge amount of chemical munitions, thousands of pieces of chemical munitions have been demolished; and in the biological field we quite recently managed to disclose a big biological weapons production programme, and as late as summer of '96 we destroyed this in a campaign which was highly successful.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about chemical weapons?

EKEUS: Well, as I mentioned, the chemical, there what remains is a little — it appears that Iraq had been experimenting with additional chemicals to those — I mentioned the nerve agents Sarin and others — but it was experimenting with the nerve agent VX, which is ten times as lethal as Sarin, which is, as we all know, a terrible weapon itself, and so far Iraq has refused to give us the full disclosure there. Now, it admitted some year ago that some few grams had been produced; and now in its latest admission there were some 3,800 kilograms, which is 3.8 metric tons they admitted. We feel that there is more, and again we know this was produced but we don't know if it still remains. Iraq's explanation is that these capabilities were destroyed in secrecy out in the desert.

LITTLEJOHNS: Isn't there some problem now about the engines for the missiles? You want to bring them to the United States for laboratory analysis and the Iraqis are refusing to allow that? Isn't that a current problem?

EKEUS: That is a current problem indeed. What we're talking about are engines which are remnants of a secret destruction programme. Iraq had some 85 Soviet operational missiles in hiding after their first declarations. We found out in '91-'92 that Iraq was indeed hiding, or had not accounted for that. Iraq later on, '92, declared these 85 missiles and said they had been destroyed in secrecy. Now we still —

LITTLEJOHNS: And in fact they had not.

EKEUS: Well, most of them had been destroyed. We managed to excavate them and count them, but it appears that all 85 are not there, and that is our problem. That's why we started a new campaign last year in November to re-excavate these remnants of engines, with the aim of bringing them abroad to have a scientific systematic analysis of them, to count how many of these remnants correspond to operational Soviet missiles, so we could have exact data, how many missiles are not accounted for, and in that how many missiles are still hidden.

LITTLEJOHNS: And they're still preventing you from doing that?

EKEUS: Iraq says no, yes. And the Security Council, we reported to the Security Council, and the Security Council asked Iraq to comply. I went to Baghdad, had a meeting in December with Mr. Tariq Aziz.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Deputy Prime Minister.

EKEUS: The Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq. And we had some progress in the talks, but not to the degree that Iraq was prepared to admit that. I raised the issue again with the Security Council by the end of the year, and the Council — I did it in a rather, I would say, moderate fashion. I didn't want to dramatize the issue —

LITTLEJOHNS: Why not? Isn't it a dramatic issue?

EKEUS: It is in the long term a very important issue for two respects. The most maybe dramatic is that Iraq, according to my understanding, is obliged to admit this removal for investigation. The less dramatic is that, well, if Iraq is a loser in this operation, because if they don't give up these, we can only say we have not accounted for — have not been allowed to make a full accounting. So I hope that we will count the situation next time I go to Baghdad, that we will settle this.

WILLIAMS: Well, you've had five years of this seemingly endless task, and one of the things that occurs to me is that it could be an endless task, because you're talking about capabilities, and the capability here, Saddam Hussein seems to have had a stable of scientists, a sort of **Apocalypse Now meets Dr. Strangelove**. It almost sounds like he's got lots of mad scientists beavering away in the desert producing this apocalyptic range of materials. And you can destroy as much equipment as you like, but it's the technology in people's heads that you can't destroy. And the minute he's koshered it, they can start up again, and where can you go? As long as he is there, it seems that you're going to have this problem, since he seems to like these things.

EKEUS: It's clear that Iraqi scientists and engineers are well skilled in producing these items. That's why we have a monitoring system to prevent Iraq from making use of these capabilities and these skills. We do it by identifying all production facilities in Iraq, and inspecting them. We have cameras monitoring the facilities as such, and especially cameras on high capable machines and machine tools. As I indicated, we have an export-import mechanism in place to prevent that new such advanced machines are brought into the country. And if you buy the machine, you can't do anything with the machine without putting into it production lines. And you have to go into a production facility with other components, while knowing —

WILLIAMS: I thought Volvo had pioneered cellular construction in Sweden where you could break up the production lines and have discrete units.

EKEUS: Yes, it can be done to some degree, but still there are elements which are necessary. So we have tagged each and every major piece of production capability which we have not destroyed, of course. Which Iraq is allowed to have for dual purposes, for civilian purposes. And if we follow through that system we think we will be able to trace every effort to break out from the regime which prohibits Iraq —

WILLIAMS: But when you go home, finally and eventually, will you be able to stop it? Or will it start all over again?

EKEUS: Well, I think — I don't know the exact intentions of the Security Council, but my feeling is that the Council has this as a two-stage thing. One is to account for the existing weapons capabilities which are prohibited. They should be identified and destroyed.

But it's not the intention to destroy Iraqi industry, Iraq's economic development. Iraq should be allowed to keep a good industrial capability. What we take away are machines which are solely — which have the sole purpose of producing weapons. But all dual capabilities they will be allowed to keep, and we will monitor them.

DERGHAM: Ambassador Ekeus, just to put it in perspective for us, how much have the Iraqis complied with the demands, percentage-wise? How much have they complied and how much is there left in terms of the demands of your Commission? Percentage. Could you give us like 70-30, or what?

EKEUS: This is — that would be too much of a — one matter is the numbers. If you talk about numbers and quantities, we have a very high percentage, I would say. I mentioned in the chemical area these large amounts. But we have also to take into account quantities, and again, if you go back to the example of chemicals, what we are concerned with is the lethality of VX; one litre of VX is ten times Sarin, and Sarin was considered one of the most dangerous nerve agents before. So how can — one cannot put percentage without qualifying it very carefully. I would say —

LITTLEJOHNS: So you're saying the quality is more important than quantity? In a sense?

EKEUS: Well, in military terms, you always need also quantity, if it should be significant. But what we have stated to the Security Council on this question is that we say quantity-wise we don't think there's much left, but the quality is such that this is significant.

DERGHAM: Can you still give a figure on this, that "not much left"? Can you give us like percentage figures, so that —

EKEUS: No, I can't calibrate lethality of, say, over VX and the Sarin. I mean, one litre of VX, one Sarin, that is equal, but it's ten times worse.

DERGHAM: Then let me ask it differently. In your assessment, has Iraq any capabilities now, nuclear capabilities, or has Iraq been greatly disarmed of the possibility of using weapons of mass destruction?

EKEUS: In nuclear capability, I think Iraq has no possibility to produce nuclear weapons. First of all, Iraq has no fissile material, or very little, left, and to produce new weapons grade material would be detected. We have a very strong monitoring system to prevent such a re-emergence. We are less satisfied with the weapons design, warhead design of nuclear devices. There are certain loopholes there, but without fissile material you don't have a weapon. So we feel that we can say clearly Iraq has no nuclear weapons, and with the existing regime Iraq will not be able to acquire nuclear weapons.

DERGHAM: So what they have right now does — with what they have, which you still think, say that they have not delivered in terms of the quantity and quality, does Iraq

now pose a threat, a real threat to its neighbours, in terms of what it has in military capability?

EKEUS: The logic for us is to say we have not accounted for all the missiles Iraq acquired, and we then draw the conclusion that, as we have not accounted, we suspect it's there; we can't say that it is there. So that makes this question quite complicated to answer. The same goes in the chemical area. Iraq states it secretly destroyed the remnants. We have not accounted for that secret destruction; therefore we can't say to the Council that Iraq is clean. But still with the existing system and the existing presence of our inspectors, I feel Iraq cannot put together a major threat to the region. The question is, of course, if quick manoeuvring would get rid of the UN presence, then there is a matter of relatively short time before it could be re-established. The nuclear, taking aside the chemical and biological, could be quite acute.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission.

DERGHAM: Sorry, just one more follow-up on this, just because I want to follow through on this. There have been reports recently that European intelligence in certain countries has — and there's been published in the press that the Iraqis are about to or are secretly developing some sort of advanced missiles technology that might be a reversal of that trend of cooperating. Is that your assessment? What can you tell us about these reports?

EKEUS: I've seen reports to this effect. We doubt that Iraq is capable of now producing any long-range missile. We have to, however, recall that the Security Council was good enough in its resolution to allow Iraq to produce middle-range or, say, missiles shorter than 150 kilometres. Above is prohibited. That means that Iraq is busy in producing 100 kilometre-range missiles and the 50 kilometre-range missiles. In the 100 kilometre area, of course, you use certain technologies which can be used for longer range — guidance systems, rocket fuel, and other things are established which give you a sort of partial capability to move into the prohibited range. But even with this reservation, and with the monitoring system, we feel confident that Iraq is not now producing long-range missiles. It is maybe actively studying the issue, and maybe one big piece here and one big piece there, but not a complete programme. I think we can confirm on that point.

WILLIAMS: Obviously your five years have probably given you a good grounding in chemistry and nuclear physics and biochemistry and all sorts of things you never expected as a diplomat. What about psychology? You're dealing with these people all of the time, and the Iraqi diplomats are some of the most sane and sophisticated and cosmopolitan to meet that you could come across. What is your assessment? And when Tariq Aziz comes,

charming as ever, and talks to you and you know that the Government he represents has been lying through its teeth consistently at regular intervals, saying this is the final complete disclosure, until you catch it out next time — I mean, how do you reconcile this with the people like Tariq Aziz?

EKEUS: Well, I must say the experience with Iraqi personnel, both diplomats, politicians, scientists, engineers and other personnel, is quite impressive. I mean, this is a very impressive people. They have good skills, they are serious, they are hard working. Our problem is obviously bordering on the political side. It appears still that Iraq is not prepared to clear up the issues. And that obviously could create tension, but in a sense it doesn't. We have established a sort of *modus vivendi*: We listen to each other, we don't trust what has been said, but we don't raise any moral issue. We see how complicated this matter is, and that is such — I would say high politics and strategic repercussions. So it almost — these are over-arching the personal context, where we try to make the best of it. And as I said, we have great respect for these persons and individuals.

WILLIAMS: Following off from that, there's always been a lot of ambivalence it seems amongst the western Powers on the Security Council in particular about the actual terms of the "mother of all resolutions" and the sanctions. One of the questions is really whether the West will ever be prepared to lift those sanctions while Saddam Hussein is in power. And to some extent this is disarming your negotiating hand, which is, "If you comply with us the sanctions will be lifted", and if there's a sort of ambivalent message coming from New York headquarters, you know, "Over our dead bodies", then doesn't this make it more difficult for you to get compliance from these people?

EKEUS: Yes, this is a matter I raise frequently with all members of the Security Council, of course, especially with the veto-carrying Powers. But my feeling is that it has settled a much more realistic attitude now. I may be wrong, but that's my political feeling, that the members of the Council now will stick to the language of the resolution. And that is not linked to any individual person, it's linked to the hard facts. If we account for the weapons, then paragraph 22 — which is the paragraph of the ceasefire which says that the prohibition against buying oil from Iraq shall no longer be enforced in such a case — I think will be implemented. But that's my personal — I can't —

DERGHAM: But you have lots of conversations, you're often in Washington or in Paris or in London, where the permanent members of the Council matter, and you have had several conversations with top level American officials. What do you understand their position to be, that the sanctions will be maintained as long as Saddam Hussein is in power?

EKEUS: I think the reasoning is the opposite. I think now the reasoning is that President Saddam Hussein has no intention to ever give up the weapons. So, through that

turnaround, the Governments who are sceptical about him never will be posed with the question to give the relief to Iraq. But I am not of the same opinion. I think that — obviously it's the President who decides in a country, and he may decide to keep these things, and I think it's possible that he will continue to insist on keeping the prohibited weapons. But I think there's also a possibility of a change of policy, and that Iraq would put priority to economic development, which of course we all hope. And that's a possibility. So I would say that those who are very sceptical about him, they don't believe anything will happen, so they're not, if I may say so, worried that they would put in front of that question.

DERGHAM: Ambassador Ekeus, you have succeeded in getting a lot of compliance from the Iraqis by keeping the channel of communications open with them. You have always insisted on the dialogue, and this is how you bring them to cooperate. Do you think it's time that Powers such as the United States, who refuse to have such a dialogue, is it time that they should reconsider in order to state to the Iraqis their terms, so that it's clear what they have to do? Particularly because a lot of suffering of the Iraqi people is deteriorating more and more, the status of the Iraqi people is deteriorating, despite the oil-for-food formula, that their infrastructure, the very fabric of the society is deteriorating. Do you think it's time to reconsider the ways of the past and see how to deal with the new realities?

EKEUS: I strongly support the idea of dialogue with the — I believe, that's my profession, I believe in diplomatic work also between adversaries. You have to try to settle problems. This may be even more important if you are, so to say, in different positions. But we all know this is not real politics for the individual countries. It's not for me to comment upon in a concrete individual case. I can only express myself in generalities about my belief. However, we have to — which was mentioned in the introduction — we have to recall that this resolution, there is at least a temporary hope now that the limited oil sales will give considerable relief to the Iraqi people, especially in the food and medicine —

DERGHAM: In fact a substitute, you mean, in fact a substitute for lifting the sanctions?

EKEUS: Because my concern, I am not so concerned any more about food and medicine, I hope that will help a lot. My concern is the long-term economic development of the country, and to develop the industry. This is a country with so much talent, and it's a tragedy that this talent cannot be activated because of the present situation. But that is Iraq's doing. It is very simple. The rules are very simple and clear by the Security Council. And I can't see what Iraq would like to preserve — why Iraq is trying to preserve biological weapons, chemical weapons. Both are outlawed, are in the process of being outlawed by the international community totally. Nuclear proliferation — Iraq has signed itself the Non-

Proliferation Treaty, not to acquire this capability. What are the sacrifices, really? None. And I hope that Iraq takes the obvious choice of getting rid of....

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Ekeus, you and your inspectors have been doing this job now for more than five years, as we pointed out. And I guess it must be a pretty costly operation that you've been undertaking. And we all know that the United Nations is in a very severe financial situation. Who's paying for this, and is the money forthcoming?

EKEUS: I'm very happy to say not one single cent is taken from the budget of the United Nations. The whole operation is organized so that in principle Iraq should carry the cost for the destruction of its —

LITTLEJOHNS: Should, but are they?

EKEUS: Of course, Iraq cannot — some money has been Iraqi money. That's — we have been able to use some $60 million of frozen assets, which were in US hands. The US has not given on the cash, but we have received the $60 million Iraqi dollars. Otherwise we get voluntary contributions —

LITTLEJOHNS: Unfrozen by the United States, you mean?

EKEUS: Well, according to a — the Security Council decided in a resolution that all States having frozen assets could provide a certain amount of money for a compensation fund and for the weapons inspectors.

LITTLEJOHNS: And some money is supposed to come from this —

DERGHAM: From the Arab gulf States, right?

LITTLEJOHNS: — oil for food?

EKEUS: And then we have voluntary contributions from States supporting our operation. In financial terms we get from the Arab gulf States, we get from various other Governments; Japan has given us some money, Britain some, and so on. And Switzerland and other smaller portions. We have also of course a large contribution in kind, that's the largest, technology, in the form of flying capability — Germany has given us very large capabilities, in flying our helicopters, our surveillance airplanes. So we have — as I say, our budget is financed totally on a voluntary basis. And I didn't expect, when I took up the job, but I've spent a lot of my time on fundraising in order to get this operation going, and not a cent is from the budget.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Ekeus, in the few seconds we have left, and I really mean a few, is this a very risky job for your people?

EKEUS: Well, we hope not. This is of course up to Iraq. Our people are, I think, very courageous and insistent. They know the rules, but they stick closely to the resolutions. And we hope there will be no serious problems.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Ekeus, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Raghida Dergham of *Al Hayat*, also of London.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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